

Out in the “Cuts”

By Cindy Zecena and Julia Salazar

We went to Ring Hill Forest to help protect the growth of young Cedar and Douglas fir trees. We arrived at Ring Hill Forest before noon. The forester told us where we needed to go to pull weeds. Most of the weeds, called Scotch Broom, grew along the road because their seeds came here stuck on truck wheels that hauled out felled trees.

We learned that Scotch Broom is considered an invasive plant and were able to outgrow the native plants. If we did not pull out the Scotch Broom, the small native trees would not be able to grow. So, we had to take out a whole bunch of these weeds. It was a difficult job—a very difficult job!

Bill Loeber, the King County forester who was with us at Ring Hill Forest, gave us more information about forests at a panel presentation he did at his office in downtown Seattle. He talked about the importance of nature’s cycles to keep the forest alive and healthy. He talked about the hydrological, nutrient and energy cycles.

For example, when Forests are healthy, they are like sponges that soak up or absorb rainwater and snowmelt. It is important that they slowly filter and release the water slowly over time to streams, rivers, lakes, and other water sources providing the ecology with needed nutrients.

We also learned that forests are never permanent and will always go through a cycle, no matter what. Because all living things in



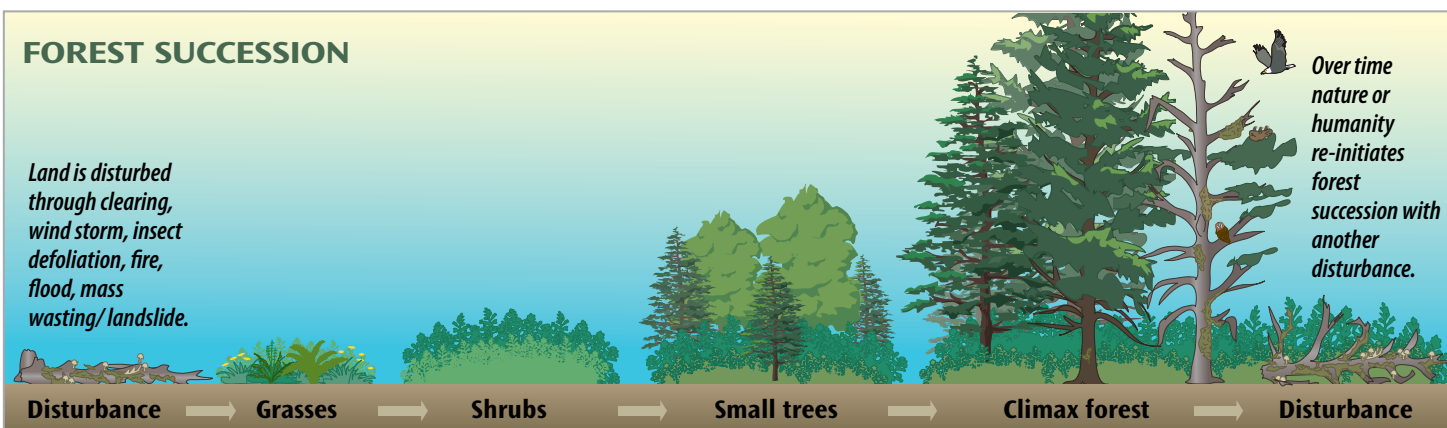
King County forester, Bill Loeber, instructed class what to do and how to do it safely.

the forest eventually die, the soil is made up of the excess carbon that comes from these dead things. That is also why the top soil of the forest is the richest in nutrients.

Forest fires can be caused by nature, through lightning strikes or people. Forest fires are called a “disturbance.” Soon after a disturbance, the forest is totally without life because all has been burnt.

We learned about “Succession” how forests evolve. Succession begins with what is called the “pioneers”. These pioneer plants are usually grasses. They grow thick and long and are soon followed by shrubs through pollination, they spread about in the forest.

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Then small trees begin to grow until they are finally tall and old. And this is why a full-blown forest with tall, large trees is called “old growth forest.” This is termed the climax of the cycle until another disturbance occurs.

Finally, foresters like Loeber makes sure that none of the practices and disturbances made by man are to be repeated. He helps educate people about managing forest growth through a process of replanting. Further, he makes it clear that cutting many trees is a disturbance that will hurt the forest.

In our summer course, we not only feel like we learned something, we were actually doing something about what we learned. Our experience at Ring Hill Forest is both fulfilling and satisfying, especially knowing that we as students are taking part in helping Mother Earth regain her health.

Just as British scientist James Lovelock said, “We need to study Earth as doctors diagnose and treat patients, not as an isolated leg or ear but as a whole living being.”

We need to treat the world as a whole and not just look at the problems at the local level.

For more information of King County forestry visit www.kingcounty.gov/environment/wlr/forestryprogram.aspx

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Section Manager: Randy Shuman

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Contributors and Photographers: Brandi Martin, Erica Parker, Leanna Lemeke, Aubrey Burrell, Mohamoud Ali, Shaq Polk, Muk de Guzman, Sam Hoard, Cindy Zecena, Ean Goddard, Ciera Boyd, Duke Nguyen, Julia Salazar, Taylor Lee and Anthony Olachea

King County Contributors and Photographers: Larry Jones, Sally Abella, Beth Cullen, Steven Burke, Bill Loeber, Jim Simmonds, Kim Stark, Jennifer Vanderhoof

Community Services Staff:

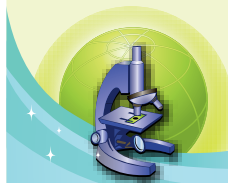
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Send questions, comments and future story ideas to:

Kate O'Laughlin - kate.olaughlin@kingcounty.gov, 206-296-8363 or
Jim Simmonds - jim.simmonds@kingcounty.gov, 206-296-1986



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